

WASHINGTON POST  
21 December 1985

# Moscow Rebuffs Protest Over Libyan Missiles

## *U.S. Weighed Military Response to Qaddafi*

By Bob Woodward and Lou Cannon  
Washington Post Staff Writers

Soviet-made SA5 long-range anti-aircraft missiles are being installed in at least two locations in Libya, and the United States has protested the action to Moscow and been rebuffed, Reagan administration officials said yesterday.

"This clearly exceeds any legitimate security requirements the Libyans have," said State Department spokesman Charles Redman. "This is a significant and dangerous escalation in the Soviet-Libyan arms relationship.

"We have made clear [to Moscow] our concern about this escalation and Soviet support for an irresponsible and erratic regime," Redman said. Asked about the Soviet reply, Redman said, "The Soviet response did not address our concerns."

Deployment of the missiles—which U.S. officials expect will be manned by Soviet troops—increases the already-high tensions between the United States and Libya, which has been a major preoccupation of the Reagan administration.

Administration sources disclosed that precautionary military planning was initiated last summer to counter Libya if it attacked a neighboring North African state or was shown to be responsible for a major terrorist incident.

U.S. officials prepared military plans that an official said were "defensive" and "of a precautionary nature." One source said the Central Intelligence Agency analyzed military options and studied in detail the potential military targets in Libya. He said that a high-level U.S. emissary was sent to the Middle East to talk with friendly nations about coordinating possible military options.

But a Pentagon analysis of possible direct U.S. military action against Libya painted a bleak

chance of success and effectively argued against it, sources said. The Pentagon said that, in the worst case, an American military operation could eventually require a commitment of six divisions or 90,000 men.

A senior administration official said this week that the military plan was never completed or submitted to the White House for action. The plan was never approved by Reagan, and subsequent discussions with him about the proposal were limited because the planning occurred while he was recuperating from his colon cancer surgery, officials said.

Last month The Washington Post reported that Reagan had authorized the CIA to undermine Qaddafi's regime covertly, another manifestation of the administration's concern with Libya.

The SA5, though a relatively old and slow-flying ground-to-air missile, can hit targets 95,000 feet in the air and has a range of about 150 miles, which could enable it to knock down U.S. reconnaissance aircraft including sophisticated AWACS planes, but not high-performance fighters. The Soviets have previously given them other anti-aircraft missiles in the SA series, but none with a range of over 40 miles, and none that provided the same capability to knock down U.S. reconnaissance planes flying over the Gulf of Sidra, which Libya considers its territorial waters. The United States regards the gulf as international waters.

In August 1981 two U.S. F14 fighters shot down two Soviet-built Libyan fighters after a brief dogfight over the gulf. The SA5 missiles have the theoretical capability to down fighter planes but are considered by military sources to be of relatively limited value when employed against such high-performance aircraft as the F14.

Anthony H. Cordesman, a Middle East arms specialist, said of the Soviet delivery of the SA5 missiles:

"It's a low-cost way of bugging the hell out of Israel, Egypt and the United States. SA5 is a museum piece, a symbolic gesture. It moves very slowly and is jamable."  
However, administration officials consider the installation of the missiles symbolically important because they bolster Qaddafi's challenge to U.S. interests in the region and escalate the Soviet commitment to his government.

Increasingly, U.S. analysts have identified Libya as the persistent source of what Secretary of State George P. Shultz and other officials have called "state-supported terrorism." This concern became extreme in mid-July, after an American was killed and 39 others held hostage for 17 days on hijacked Trans World Airlines Flight 847.

While Reagan and his advisers won considerable public support and praise for their handling of this incident, the appraisal within the government was more pessimistic. According to administration sources, the issue was discussed with the president in mid-July shortly before he underwent surgery for colon cancer. Reagan reportedly agreed with the views of CIA Director William J. Casey; Robert C. McFarlane, then national security affairs adviser, and other top aides that the administration had been fortunate in the outcome of the crisis and needed contingency plans to deal with possible future incidents. That led to the drawing up of plans for possible military action against Qaddafi.

Qaddafi visited Moscow Oct. 10-12 where he sought but failed to obtain a treaty of friendship and cooperation with the Soviet Union, assistance in building a nuclear reactor and a more favorable treatment for repayment of his \$4 billion to \$5 billion debt to the Soviets.

According to U.S. diplomatic sources and other Middle East specialists, the visit did not go well. One U.S. official said that discussions between Qaddafi and his Soviet hosts were "acrimonious" and that the Soviets gave the Libyan leader "a dressing-down" for his support of terrorist activities.